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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how the United States is portrayed in Norwegian textbooks. U.S. history receives rather brief treatment in most Norwegian history textbooks. Norwegian students learn about the United States largely in their studies of English. A chapter-by-chapter examination of the treatment of the United States in two English textbooks frequently used in Norwegian high schools is outlined. The examination revealed that the Norwegian syllabus emphasized three areas in the textbooks: (1) the structure and process of U.S. government; (2) U.S. immigration; and (3) ethnic groups in the United States, with special emphasis on Native Americans or African Americans. A 5-item list of references is included. (DB)

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Exploring America -

How the U. S. is depicted in Norway

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In Norway, the history of the U.S. is studied within the context of world history. Such study is divided into chronological chunks running from the dawn of civilization to the 1400s (approximately), then the eras from the 1500s to the early 1800s, the 19th century, the early 20th century, and recent history (1945-present). Obviously the U.S. receives no coverage in the first period and minimal coverage in the second.

Norway has a national curriculum for grades 1-9, the elementary, and middle schools. schooling is not mandated after grade 9, but nearly everyone goes on to some other schooling, with 2/3 or more going to the academic upper secondary schools.

Schooling begins at age 7 after three years of "barnehagen," a more developed form of day care setting. Students, thus, enter the upper secondary schools at age 16 or 17 and are graduated at 19, or even 20, three years later. Students in Norwegian upper secondary schools are more mature than their American counterparts. That may be due in part to their slightly older age (Nelson, 1991).

If one examines one of the two or three approved textbooks for teaching history in the videregående skoler one can see what is deemed of import for historical study. Since the textbook is written to correspond to the syllabus, examining textbooks provides a clue as to what is intended to happen in Norwegian schools more so than would be expected in the U.S.

The American Revolution is covered in four pages, and that is augmented by a page or two on the new nation of the United States of America. That constitutes the coverage in history under the study of the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

The most widely used textbook gives two chapters to American history of this period, one on the years 1860-1914, and the other running from 1920-1940. The two world wars are covered in their own chapters with American involvement integrated into the wars in Europe and Europe/the Pacific respectively.

In the first chapter, the issue of slavery and the Civil War are paramount. Lincoln's election and subsequent succession of confederate states is mentioned. The freeing of the slaves and their receiving suffrage is briefly contrasted with the withholding of same for women until the year 1920.

After this there is brief coverage of Westward Expansion with the Homestead Act of 1862, the Transcontinental Railroad, the destruction of the buffalo, development of farming in the plains, and loss of Indian lives and land highlighting the four pages of this section. The next four pages deal with the rise of industry, the trusts, unions, and Roosevelt trust busting. This ends the chapter.

Following World War I comes a chapter on "Capitalism in Crisis," covering the period 1920 to 1940. The "Roaring twenties" with their Hollywood films, the rise of jazz, and the inception of radio are described in a page before a discussion of efficiency in industry is presented. This included attention to Frederick Taylor, but was contrasted to the rise of the IWW and workers' issues amidst capitalist gains.

The Depression, worldwide and in the U.S., is described and pictured and leads into FDR, the New Deal, and the drop in production in the 1930's. A table contrasts industrial production in 16 countries from 1927 to 1934. Social economies in crisis were then discussed along with theories of Marx as well as Keynes, whose ideas were influential at the Versailles Conference in 1919 and in Great Britain in the mid-1930s.

That is about it for American history in most Norwegian history textbooks. The bulk of American study comes in the context of studying English. Within that there has been a change within the past ten years in the Norwegian National Syllabus. American study is shared, along with the study of Great Britain, Canada, and Australia. Most attention is given to American and British literature, history, and contemporary study.

All students must take English in the first year of videregående (grade 10), which would be the students' seventh year of English study. The next two years of English are taught at different intensity levels ranging from three to five hours per week, depending on the various programs that students select - language emphasis, science emphasis, vocational emphasis, commercial emphasis, social science emphasis, among others. The content of English generally does not vary, however.

Some schools emphasize British study in first semester and American study second semester. Some (a small minority) teach only British study second year and only American (with some Canadian) third year. Again, content is generally the same.

The modern syllabus gave emphasis to three American issues: 1) American government - structure and process; 2) American immigration; 3) American ethnicity with special study of one of two groups - Native American Indians or African Americans.

There are three textbooks "series" used for English study, with two having dominance. These are written by teachers of English. One series of three books is co-authored by teachers in the Trondheim (Trondelag) region, and the other by teachers in the østfjord region south of Oslo. Two or three of the five or six authors are native born Americans who married Norwegians and have become naturalized Norwegian citizens or hold dual citizenship. At least one of the other authors has been the recipient of a U.S. government-sponsored summer travel grant for four weeks in the U.S.

Textbook Coverage in English

Since text format is similar, one text for each grade level will be explained. Imagine by Anderson and Hals is designed for 5+5 course that second graders in the vg skole take. It mixes American and British selections in six chapters. The latter chapter also has selections from India and Ireland, and Chapter Seven focuses on selections from South Africa, Australia, and Canada in the 35 pages. The first chapter

has a short story by Thurber. The second had a focus on American schools - a discussion among exchange students, a description of American education, and a brief piece on the Tennessee Governor's School of International Studies. A short poem by Carl Sandburg is also in the chapter.

Chapter Three examines the experiences of childhood and growing up. An excerpt from Fatherhood by Bill Cosby, a short story by John Updike, a reprint from Teen Magazine on anorexia, and a short story from Vonnegut's Welcome to the Monkey House comprise the American contributions.

Chapter Four, "Pastimes," has photos of Americans at play and a brief description (four pages with photos) of some of the National Parks. Chapter Five, "Different Lives - Different Conditions," has a brief piece on teenage alcoholics, and the rest of the selections are British.

Chapter six, the longest chapter, has about 50 pages of American material, including the Pledge of Allegiance, Woody Guthrie's "This Land is Your Land," Robinson's "Richard Cory," an observation on cars and high school students, and another Bill Cosby piece. For a Native American focus there are photos of Pueblos and Navahos, some census data from 1980, a poem by Bonnie Jean Silva, and a short story by Leslie Marmon Silko. Later there are three paragraphs on Indian philosophy.

Addressing the issue of blacks, there is a photo of Jesse Jackson, a time line of events in the history of black Americans, some observational census data on the status of blacks, and a short piece on Martin Luther King, Jr. from an Atlanta Constitution article in 1982.

A short piece on illegal immigration entitled "wetbacks" describes the origin of the term, but not its pejorative nature. A six page description of city problems and life examines architecture in New York, homelessness, street crime, runaways, and street drugs. Immigrant ancestry data from the 1980 census is included.

Acid rain is the subject of a short piece, noting that it is a world problem. Another, nuclear weapons, is the subject of another short piece as is the "Star Wars" defense system discussed in three full pages.

There is little history of the issues described, and only short pieces on contemporary American issues. There is a map of the U.S., but no other geographic aid.

Consider is designed for students taking the two-year English course, or it can be used for the students joining the course for one year. Unlike Imagine (and most other Norwegian texts on the subject), this book is not just excerpts from other literature. It consists of core texts written especially for the book. There are also supplementary materials from a wide variety of sources.

The 347-page book is divided into ten chapters. The Introductory chapter mixes British and American selections. The first American section briefly examines the four American regions - Northeast, South, Midwest, and West, with comments largely drawn from one of the author's American upbringing and another's four-week summer tour of the U.S. sponsored by the U.S. Department of State. There is also half a page on "The Vietnam War" and another half page on "Women in the U.S." The former tallies American dead, describes and pictures the first Vietnam Memorial, and mentions the psychological scars suffered by individuals and the nation. The later subject discusses women as voters, in the work force, and issues directly affecting them such as abortion, maternity leave (haphazard by Scandinavian standards) and working mothers. The chapter ends by describing the U.S. as "Trendsetter for the Western World" and the openness of Americans. American mobility is also briefly discussed.

Chapters Seven through Ten (approximately 165 pages) then focus on what is important about the U.S. to Norwegians. The four chapters mix core reading with supplementary reading and correspond to the four major themes of the syllabus as

promulgated by the Radet for videregående opplæring (RVO), Council of Upper Secondary School of the Ministry of Education. Again, these are immigration, Native Americans, African Americans, and American government and politics.

Chapter Seven on immigration starts with two tables, at least one of which is likely to be found in an American social studies text, i.e., the "Foreign-born population in the U.S. in 1920." The second gives "Racial and Ethnic origins of the U.S. population," 1980, 1989 and percent increase. The groups are those used in the census - White, Black, American Indian, Asian and Pacific Islander, Others, and also the overlapping category, Spanish origin. The chapter focuses on major groups of immigrants and Scandinavian settlers. The issue of Cultural Pluralism, Melting Pot, and Salad Bowl is briefly discussed, followed by how immigrants were received in the periods 1830 to 1860 (Nativist movement and the "know nothings") and 1890 to 1914. Attacks on Scandinavians in the former period are highlighted. The second period focused on the American Protective Association (APA) and its racist ideology. The quotas of 1924 to 1965 are briefly mentioned, as well as the 1965 immigration policy.

Details on immigration periods including origin of groups and regulations in those various periods are discussed. New immigrants - Hispanics and Southeast Asians, comprise the end of this section. The chapter ends with a section on internal migration with population change in the 1970s and 1980s.

Supplemental reading covers a description of Buffalo Bill Cody, a Scandinavian immigrant's letter to a lawyer requesting assistance in obtaining a divorce, an excerpt of English language lessons for Scandinavians in the late 1800s, a brief personal account of being a Jewish immigrant, data on immigration in six U.S. cities (New York, Chicago, Baltimore, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, and Lawrence, MA. Excerpts from Ragtime on immigrants in the city slums and from Howard Fast's The Immigrants are offered. A graph reveals where (in 1988) immigrants settled.

Chapter Eight highlights the first Americans, first tracing them historically from their arrival in North America trough relationships with the early settlers and finally to Indian removal. This is followed by a section on White Man's images of the Indians - Noble Savages, Bloodthirsty Savages, Whiskey Indian, Proud Indian. The wars on the plains of the 1870s, 1890s, and the Dawes Act of 1887 comprise the next section.

Indian policy of the New Deal and post World War II are discussed with examples. The American Indian Movement (AIM) is presented in the context of the 1960s and the black power movement. Subsequent actions such as the occupation of Alcatraz (1969), occupation of the BIA office and Wounded Knee (1973) are the next focus of attention, with the chapter ending with a discussion of the BIA today and the status of Indians today. (There's a wonderful quote from President Reagan illustrating the continued indifference toward Indian Concerns.)

Supplemental reading for this chapter includes excerpts by N. Scott Momaday, Chief Seattle's treaty speech of 1885, a whiskey ad insulting to Indians, and the proclamation made on Alcatraz in 1969.

Chapter Nine presents a history of American Blacks from the first slave ships through the civil war and Reconstruction and the segregation and violence form 1877 to the 1950s. Included are lynching data from 1882 to 1950.

The next sections present the great Northern Migration, Pan-Africanism, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Black Power Movement. Some information is so condensed (like that on Malcolm X) as to be simplistic and misleading, but generally more attention is paid to these issues than that done in textbooks for American social studies classrooms. African Americans today are presented with data on school completion, family income, unemployment, out-of-wedlock births, and families headed by women for both blacks and whites. A brief portrait of Atlanta includes the fact that it will host the 1996 Olympics. I read galley sheets in December, and the book was out in late March.) be admired. (Norwegian turnaround times on publishing are truly to

Supplementary readings are by Langston Hughes, Stokley Carmichael, and Barbara Jordan.

The last chapter examines Government and Politics in the U.S. This chapter is a bit longer than the previous two. It begins with the constitution and its contents presented in a discussion format with examples. The chapter then jumps to politics in the USA today - party backgrounds, electing a president, voter turnout, the presidency, federal v. states' rights, local government and state government.

Supplementary reading includes newspaper account of the resignation of Justice Brennan, the veto by the President of a bill on unpaid family leave, Louisiana's abortion bill, and, finally, a nine-page extract of Edwin O'Connor's The Last Hurrah.

This book not only illustrates content, but values within that content. Many Norwegian schools have access to other materials form both Norwegian and non-Norwegian sources. A book published in Germany for use in English language classrooms was reprinted by USIS in 1989 and has been made available to all teachers of English in the videregående skoler of Norway. Thus, the information, but not the exact material, is available to students. The 126 pages of text in American Life and Institutions has ten brief chapters on the Search for America (geographically and spiritually); the diverse peoples of the U.S. as evidenced by immigration, migration, political differences; American government; education; economy, labor and welfare; transportation; media; cultural life; lifestyles; sports and recreation.

Since no chapter has more than 19 pages, and some are as short as 9, it is clear that only superficial coverage impossible. But in some areas that is more than is available in any other volume.

This book is not terribly doctrinaire nor is a strong ideological grounding apparent. Clearly it seeks to promote positive views of the U.S., but negative things are not ignored, such as many Americans feeling more compassion for unfortunates abroad than at home. This book also tries to describe the American character to a

European audience - Americans love practical jokes and puns, they are easily informal, certain topics - income, religion, politics - are avoided in conversation. These things I found disquieting, as I do all generalizations resulting in stereotypes. The book provides good contemporary insight into America and often gives more than one image or view. There is little on the ethnic groups studied in the Norwegian curriculum. Immigration has good, brief coverage, and Government is dealt with, but mostly in a structural way. During my travels I was asked to speak on government, but rather to interpret practice, evaluate the structure, and explain implications of governmental action.

In 1991 a book Roots of American Diversity was made available by the Information Centre for Language Teaching in Norway, part of the Royal Ministry of Church Affairs, Education and Research. The book was authored by my predecessor at the RVO, William L Ziglar. The book deals with immigration, Native Americans and African Americans with a brief commentary on Hispanics in America. It fits nicely with the Norwegian Curriculum, but fails to go beyond that, except for a brief postscript on new Asian immigrants. The author's academic training is in history, and the book approaches its topics in an historical manner.

Norwegian teachers augment much of this print information with empirical data. Each summer ten teachers of English are awarded four-week group travel grants to he U.S., and many more have visited the U.S. as students, exchange teachers, or tourists. They have augmented the curriculum with their own observations and information provided on the organized summer tours.

It is these teachers that most realize how much is missing from their materials and who most utilize the Roving Fulbright Scholar. Requests for presentations first focused on the standard curriculum, particularly with updating information on those topics in the syllabus. Thus, the 1990 census was a real source of interest and data, but those data needed to be interpreted. Updating the status of Native Americans and

African Americans was widely requested, as well as better historical depth (this may abate now that the Ziglar volume is available).

In addition, material and information on Hispanic and Asians in the U.S. was also popular once I informed teachers of its existence and importance.

Television was of interest both because of its key place in American lives and because of the large number of American shows imported to Norway. The images of America as seen through Young Riders, Airwolf, Knot's Landing, and Twin Peaks could provide a most unusual view of the U.S.

American literature and writers, particularly ethnic writers or "messages" was a topic that I addressed more in informal discussion than in formal presentations. One illustration of the wide range of reading was this. At a get-together with five English teachers at a small school in southwestern Norway, a comment was made about males nursing babies. Immediately four of us thought of Women on the Edge of Time by Marge Piercy - a good book, but unlikely to be as widely read by a small body of American social studies or English teachers.

Both students and teachers wanted an "inside" look at American schools, K-University, not a structural approach. That was provided by me, using at times, the various students who had attended American high schools as "witness" to my statements.

The Norwegian approach to the study of America corresponds to what is currently referred to as an Afrocentric rather than Eurocentric focus. That focus, currently limited to African Americans, Native Americans, and immigration will expand as Asian Americans and Hispanic Americans become a more integral part of the curriculum. I found this approach more human, more humane, and less nationalistic and would advocate some variation of it for American schools.

Terrie Epstein has offered one proposal for this with a Eurocentric approach in junior high and an Afrocentric one in senior high U.S. history (Epstein, 1991). Others are possible.

I would also hope for more thorough assessment regarding how America is taught in other nations. This would be beyond mere textbook examination to actual classroom "experiences." It may be that we in the U.S. can break the traditional chains of how we teach U.S. history only by understanding how those outside the U.S. teach about the U.S. By seeing the messages that they receive and send, we may better understand why we do as we do.

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